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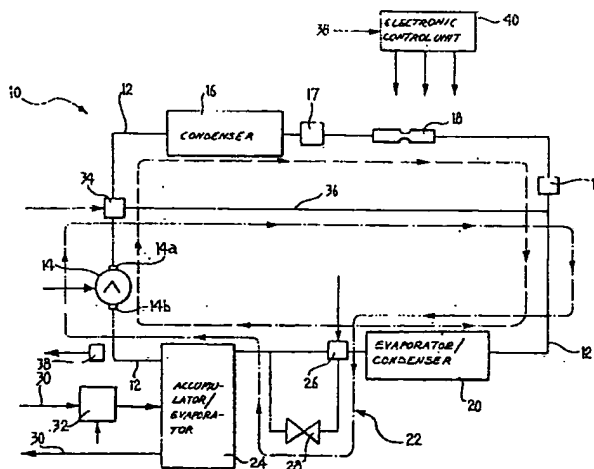
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(54) A system for airconditioning the passenger compartment of a vehicle

(57) The system (10) comprises a circuit (12) in which a working fluid is subjected to a thermodynamic cycle and which includes a compressor (14) connected to a condenser (16) followed by an expansion device (18) and then by a heat exchanger (20) which can act as an evaporator and as a condenser and the output of which is connected to the input (14b) of the compressor (14). A by-pass duct (36) has one end connected between the compressor (14) and the condenser (16) and the other end connected to the input of the heat exchanger (20). Switching solenoid valves (26, 34, 19) adopt a first and a second operative condition in which the by-pass duct (36) is excluded from and connected in the circuit (12), respectively, so that, in the first condition, the system (10) operates as a cooling system and

the heat exchanger (20) acts as an evaporator and, in the second condition, the system (10) operates as a heating system with a heat pump and the exchanger (20) acts as a condenser. A further heat exchanger (24) is interposed between the heat exchanger (20) and the intake of the compressor (14) and can act, in the first and second operative conditions of the solenoid valves (26, 34, 19), respectively, as an accumulator for the working fluid in the liquid state, and as an evaporator. The further heat exchanger (24) is connected to the liquid engine-coolant circuit (30) by means of a variable-flow solenoid valve (32) controlled in a manner such as to bring about controlled superheating of the working fluid which enters the compressor (14) in the gaseous state, in dependence on its detected temperature, when detected, when the system is operating as a cooler.



EP 1 112 873 A2

D scription

[0001] The present invention relates to a system for cooling and heating a passenger compartment of a motor vehicle.

[0002] More specifically, the subject of the invention is a system which can operate as a cooling system in a first operating condition and as a heating system with a heat pump in a second operating condition.

[0003] The system according to the invention comprises:

a closed circuit in which a working fluid is subjected to a thermodynamic cycle and which includes a compressor with a delivery opening connected to a condenser, followed by fluid expansion means and then by a heat exchanger which can act as an evaporator and as a condenser and the output of which is connected to the suction intake of the compressor,

a by-pass duct having one end connected between the compressor and the condenser and the other end connected between the expansion means and the input of the said heat exchanger,

electrically-operated switching valve means which can adopt a first and a second operative condition in which the by-pass duct is excluded from and connected in the circuit, respectively, so that, in the said first condition, the system operates as a cooling system and the said heat exchanger acts as an evaporator and, in the second condition, the system operates as a heating system with a heat pump and the said exchanger acts as a condenser,

a further heat exchanger of the gas/liquid type, which is interposed between the said heat exchanger and the suction intake of the compressor, and which can act, in the first and second operating conditions of the switching valve means, respectively, as an accumulator for the working fluid in the liquid state, and as an evaporator,

the said further heat exchanger being connected to the liquid engine-coolant circuit of the motor vehicle by means of a variable-flow solenoid valve,

control means, being associated with the solenoid valve, able to modify the flow in the solenoid valve when the said switching valve means are in the said first operative condition so as to bring about controlled superheating of the working fluid which enters the compressor, in dependence on its detected temperature.

[0004] Further characteristics and advantages of the invention will become clear from the following detailed

description, given purely by way of non-limiting example, with reference to the appended drawing, which shows the structure of a system according to the invention in the form of a block diagram.

5 [0005] With reference to the drawing, the system according to the invention, generally indicated 10, comprises a closed circuit 12 by means of which a working fluid is subjected to a thermodynamic cycle.

[0006] In the circuit 12 there are disposed a compressor 14, a first heat exchanger 16, a first expansion device 18, and a second heat exchanger 20.

[0007] The compressor 14 is, for example, a compressor with variable-displacement pistons and has a delivery opening 14a and a suction intake 14b.

15 [0008] The heat exchanger 16 is a condenser and is disposed in the engine compartment of the motor vehicle, whereas the second heat exchanger 20 can act as an evaporator and as a condenser and is disposed in a ventilation duct (not shown) communicating with the passenger compartment of the vehicle.

20 [0009] An on-off solenoid valve 19 is preferably disposed between the expansion device and the heat exchanger 20.

[0010] The expansion device 18 is, for example, a tube with a calibrated orifice.

25 [0011] A cartridge filter 17, for example, of the type with silica-gel or zeolites, may advantageously be interposed between the output of the condenser 16 and the expansion device 18. This filter may optionally be incorporated in the condenser 16.

30 [0012] A valve arrangement, generally indicated 22, and a further heat exchanger 24 are interposed between the output of the heat exchanger 20 and the suction intake 14b of the compressor 14.

35 [0013] The valve arrangement 22 comprises a diverting solenoid valve 26 having its input connected to the output of the heat exchanger 20, a first output connected directly to the input of the heat exchanger 24, and a second output connected to the input of the heat exchanger 24 via a second fluid expansion device 28 such as an expansion valve or a tube with a calibrated orifice.

40 [0014] The heat exchanger 24 is of the gas/liquid type and can act as an accumulator for the working fluid in the liquid state, or as an evaporator.

45 [0015] The heat exchanger 24 is connected to the liquid engine-coolant circuit 30 (not shown) of the motor vehicle, by means of a variable-flow solenoid valve 32. This solenoid valve is, for example, a proportional solenoid valve.

50 [0016] A second diverting solenoid valve, indicated 34, is disposed between the output 14a of the compressor 14 and the input of the condenser 16. This solenoid valve has a first output connected to the input of the condenser 16 and a second output connected to an end of a by-pass duct 36. The other end of this by-pass duct is connected between the solenoid valve 19 and the input of the heat exchanger 20.

[0017] A temperature sensor 38 is disposed in the cir-

cuit 12 between the output of the heat exchanger 24 and the suction intake 14b of the compressor 14 for supplying, to an electronic control unit 40, electrical signals indicative of the temperature of the gaseous working fluid at the intake of the said compressor.

[0018] The control unit 40 is also arranged to drive the solenoid valves 19, 26, 32 and 34 in the manners which will be described below.

[0019] The control unit 40 is arranged to cause the diverting valves 26, 34 and the solenoid valve 19 to adopt a first operative condition and a second operative condition.

[0020] In the first of these conditions, the solenoid valve 19 is open and the working fluid circulates solely in the main circuit 12, that is, starting from the compressor 14, through the condenser 16, the first expansion device 18, the heat exchanger 20 which, in this case, acts as an evaporator, the valve 26 and, from this valve, goes directly to the further heat exchanger 24 and then to the compressor 14 again, without passing through the second expansion device 28. In this condition, the heat exchanger 24 acts as an accumulator for working fluid in the liquid state and the solenoid valve 32 is driven by the control unit 40 so as to bring about controlled superheating of the working fluid, which enters the compressor 14 in the gaseous state, in dependence on its temperature detected by the sensor 38.

[0021] In the first operative condition of the above-described system, the working fluid thus flows substantially along the broken line shown in the drawing. In this condition, the system operates as a cooling system in order to cool the air in the passenger compartment. The working fluid in the gaseous state is subjected to an increase in pressure and temperature by the compressor 14 and then reaches the condenser 16 in which it gives up heat to the outside atmosphere, cooling and changing to the liquid state. Then, as the working fluid passes through the expansion device 18, it expands rapidly and cools. As it passes through the heat exchanger 20, the working fluid returns to the gaseous state, absorbing heat from the air-flow which is sent into the passenger compartment of the motor vehicle. At the output of the evaporator, any working fluid in the liquid state is deposited in the exchanger 24 which acts as an accumulator, whilst the working fluid in the gaseous state, suitably superheated, then returns to the compressor 14.

[0022] The control unit 40 is arranged to cause the diverting solenoid valves 26, 34 and the solenoid valve 19 to adopt a second operative condition in which the solenoid valve 19 is closed and the working fluid follows the path indicated by the chain line in the drawing. In this mode of operation, the system 10 acts as a heater. In fact, the working fluid in the gaseous state is subjected to an increase in pressure and temperature by the compressor 14 and is sent through the diverting valve 34 and the by-pass duct 36 to the heat exchanger 20 disposed in the ventilation duct communicating with the passenger compartment of the vehicle. In this condition,

the heat exchanger 20 acts as a condenser and gives up heat to the air-flow directed to the passenger compartment. The working fluid is then passed through the diverting valve 26 into the second expansion device 28 and returns to the gaseous state, drawing heat from the heat exchanger 24 which now acts as an evaporator. In this condition, the solenoid valve 32 is driven in a manner such as to ensure a predetermined high flow-rate of (hot) coolant liquid to the heat exchanger 24. For example, the solenoid valve 32 may be kept fully open in these conditions.

[0023] The system according to the invention enables the above-described two modes of operation to be achieved with a high level of efficiency and with the use of a small number of components.

[0024] Naturally, the principle of the invention remaining the same, the forms of embodiment and details of construction may be varied widely with respect to those described and illustrated purely by way of non-limiting example, without thereby departing from the scope of the invention as defined in the appended claims.

[0025] In a variant, not shown, the valve arrangement 20 shown in the drawing may be replaced simply by a choking solenoid valve which can selectively adopt a condition in which it is fully open to the flow of working fluid between the heat exchangers 20 and 24 and a condition in which it chokes the cross-section of flow for the fluid, reducing it to a restricted cross-section suitable for bringing about expansion of the fluid.

Claims

1. A system (10) for cooling and heating the passenger compartment of a vehicle, comprising:

a closed circuit (12) in which a working fluid is subjected to a thermodynamic cycle and which includes a compressor (14) with a delivery opening (14a) connected to a condenser (16), followed by fluid expansion means (18) and then by a heat exchanger (20) which can act as an evaporator and as a condenser and the output of which is connected to the suction intake (14b) of the compressor (14),

a by-pass duct (36) having one end connected between the compressor (14) and the condenser (16) and the other end connected between the expansion means (18) and the input of the heat exchanger (20),

electrically-operated switching valve means (26, 34, 19) which can adopt a first and a second operative condition in which the by-pass duct (36) is excluded from and connected in the circuit (12), respectively, so that, in the first condition, the system (10) operates as a cooling

system and the heat exchanger (20) acts as an evaporator and, in the second condition, the system (10) operates as a heating system with a heat pump and the exchanger (20) acts as a condenser,

a further heat exchanger (24) of the gas/liquid type, which is interposed between the heat exchanger (20) and the suction intake of the compressor (14), and which can act, in the first and second operative conditions of the switching valve means (26, 34, 19), respectively, as an accumulator for the working fluid in the liquid state, and as an evaporator,

the said further heat exchanger (24) being connected to the liquid engine-coolant circuit (30) of the motor vehicle by means of a variable-flow solenoid valve (32), and

control means (40) associated with the said solenoid valve (32) being able to modify the flow of the solenoid valve (32) when the said switching valve means (26, 34, 19) are in the first operative condition so as to bring about controlled superheating of the working fluid, which enters the compressor (14) in the gaseous state, in dependence on its detected temperature.

2. A system according to Claim 1, in which the control means (40) can keep the said solenoid valve (32) in a condition in which it ensures a predetermined flow-rate of engine coolant liquid to the said further heat exchanger (24) when the switching valve means (26, 34, 19) are in the second operative condition.
3. A system according to Claim 1 or Claim 2, in which the expansion means (18) comprise a tube with a calibrated orifice (14).
4. A system according to any one of the preceding claims, in which a valve arrangement (22) is interposed between the said heat exchanger (20) and the further said heat exchanger (24) and
 - in a first condition, can connect the output of the heat exchanger (20) to the input of the further heat exchanger (24) without bringing about expansion of the working fluid, and
 - in a second condition, can connect the output of the heat exchanger (20) to the input of the further heat exchanger (24), bringing about expansion of the working fluid.
5. A system according to Claim 4, in which the said valve arrangement (22) comprises a diverting valve

(26) which can connect the output of the heat exchanger (20) to the input of the further heat exchanger (24) selectively directly, or through second fluid expansion means (28), respectively.

6. A system according to Claim 5, in which the second fluid expansion means comprise a tube with a calibrated orifice.
7. A system according to Claim 4, in which the said valve arrangement (22) comprises a choking solenoid valve which is interposed between the output of the said heat exchanger (20) and the input of the further heat exchanger (24) and which can permit a flow of working fluid between them selectively through a full flow cross-section, or through a restricted flow cross-section suitable for bringing about expansion of the working fluid, respectively.

